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DE RUEHLO #0732/01 0720927
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P 120927Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7753
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 000732

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EO 12958 DECL: 03/10/2018
TAGS PGOV, PREL, PINR, EU, UK
SUBJECT: UK LIBERAL DEMOCRATS RECOVERING FROM PARLIAMENTARY
DISASTER

REF: 07 LONDON 4655

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connelly, reasons 1.4 b, d

1. (C/NF) Summary. The UK's Liberal Democrat Party limped into its spring conference in Liverpool March 7-9 following a disastrous performance
A Very Bad Day: The Lib Dems and The EU Reform Treaty

2. (SBU) March 5 marked the worst day for the Lib Dems since one infamous week in January 2006, when the party became the laughing stock of Br

3. (C/NF) This position left both the pundits and the public scratching their heads: why would the UK's most pro-Europe party, whose new leader
Nick Clegg and His "Cojones"

4. (SBU) In any case, Clegg failed to carry it off. As expected, the Lib Dem motion to hold a separate "in or out" referendum on UK membership

5. (SBU) The use of the word "cojones" - not wide-spread in Britain as it is in the U.S. - came back to bite Clegg in the, er, nether regions
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the Liberal Democrat leadership's protests in the debates have become ever more shrill," Hague said, "is that, at some point in recent months,

6. (C/NF) Difficult as it is to imagine, the situation got worse for Clegg after that. In the ensuing vote on the Conservative referendum motion

7. (SBU) The press ate Clegg alive. "No Cojones Clegg" ran the headline from the Independent. "Calamity Clegg's Spectacular Blunder," ran the
Speech Rallies The Troops

8. (SBU) Clegg went into the spring conference shaken by the events of the previous two days, but managed to deliver a strong key note speech

9. (C/NF) Conference organizers told us beforehand that the Lisbon Treaty would be kept deliberately off the agenda in anticipation that the
"We've Got To Make This One Stick"

10. (C/NF) The March 5 disaster notwithstanding, Lib Dem party members appear happy with Clegg's performance so far. Some noted to us, however

11. (C/NF) XXXXXXXXXXXX says that so far Clegg has been decisive and thoughtful. In contrast, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, former leader Sir Menzies "b

12. (C/NF) Shadow Housing Minister Lembit Opik has a different view of Clegg. In Opik's view, Clegg has
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surrounded himself with insiders who carry out his wishes without consulting others, thus allowing Clegg to avoid direct confrontation, a trait

13. (C/NF) No matter how Clegg ultimately performs, however, XXXXXXXXXXXX told us frankly that, as the third Lib Dem leader in two years, the

Comment

14. (C/NF) One commentator compared the Lib Dem performance on the Lisbon Treaty referendum to watching a "car crash in slow motion." One could
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